to suggtst steps to reduce delays in grant/ renewal of Prospecting Licenses/Mining Leases. The Committee is also to consider and suggest further delegation of powers to the State Governments regarding grant/renewal of prospecting Licences, Vimping Leases and measures to be taken to prevent illegal mining.

Exploration and development of minerals in North-Eastern Region

2101. DR. B. B. DUTTA: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether the task force set up by Government on exploration and development of minerals in the North-Eastern Region has submitted its report.

(b) if so, the main recommendations thereof; and

(c) the action taken by Government thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND THE MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The main recommendations of the Task Force are as under:—

(i) Creation of a separate Directorate of Geology & Mining (DGM) in States where it does not exist and suitably strengthening the existing Directorate including creation of field formations.

(ii) The DGM should work as a single window for entrepreneurs who want to set up mineral based industries.

(iii) The Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM) to open office at Guwahati and to arrange for collection of mineral samples for testing at their laboratories free of cost.

(iv) The States which do not have their own Minor Mineral Concession Rules to formulate such Rules.

(v) Creation of a separate fund under the title "North Eastern Mineral Development Fund" (NEMDF) for, inter-alia, construction of link roads between mines sites and the plant sites and the nearest public roads, cost of preparation of pre-feasibility study and generation of environmental base line data for setting up mineral based industries and cost of transportation of bulk quantity of minerals for pilot plant scale testing by IBM.

(vi) Creation of a separate cell for financing mineral based industries in the North Easter Development Financial Corporation with similar facilities in other public sector banks and financial institutions operating in North Eastern States.

(vii) Provision of transport subsidy for ores as well as semi-processed minerals for transport outside North Eastern States as also for essential raw materials to be brought from outside for use in the processing of minerals of North-Eastern States.

(viii) Facility of on-the-job training to personnel engaged in mining and related activities especially below the level of Mining Engineer free of cost and where cost is involved, the same should be borne out of the fund available with North-Eastern Council and also out of the NEMDF.

(ix) Creation of faculty of Mining in the Central University at Tezpur and in the IIT Guwahati and introduction of courses on Management Studies in the Central University and North Eastern Hill University with provisions of reservation of certain seats for local indigenous) people.

(x) Introduction of 100 per cent tax exemption for investments or deposits (both principal and interest) with industries and developmental agencies in the North Eastern Region engaged in exploitation of minerals, power and other infrastructure with encouragemtnt to domestic private financial institutions with incentives for investment.

(xi) Conversion of all existing rail lines into broad gauge and dobuling of the main trunk route from New Jalpaiguri to Dibrugarh and also expansion of cargo handling capacity at certain distribution points.

(xii) Rail transit facilities through Bangladesh to West Bengal for movement of men/materials from/to Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur.

(xiii) MECL to take up exploration work on promotional basis to be funded by the Ministry of Mines as also by NEMDF.

(c) All such recommendations made by any Committee set up by the Government are processed in consultation with the Planning Commission, Ministry of Finance and other concerned Ministries in accordance with the established procedure in the Government.

Fixation of Royalty Rates of Orissa Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan

2102. SHRI SANATAN BISI: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan have approved the recent fixation of royalty rates;

(b) whether there is reduction of royalty from Rs. 25 crores to Rs. 7 crores in respect of Orissa; and

(c) if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND THE MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA): (a) to (c) Revision of rates of royalty on major minerals is carried out as per the provisions of Section 9(3) of the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act, 1957. The rates of royalty on major minerals (other than coal and lignite) have already been revised vide Govt. Gazette Notification GSR No. 214(E) dated 11.4.1997. The revision of royalty rates was effected on the basis of the recommendations of the Study Group constituted for the purpose. The Study Group had detailed consultations with the State Governments, including Governments of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan etc., Mineral industry and other agencies in the matter. It is estimated that on account of revision of royalty, the revenue accruals to Government of Orissa would increase by about Rs. 10 crores (on the level of production and price of 1994-95).

National Project on bio-gas development in Bihar

2103. SHRI S. S. AHLUWALIA: Will the Minister of NON-CONVENTIONAL ENERGY SOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are implementing National project on bio-gas development in Bihar;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the total number of family type and community type biogas plants set up in the State during the last five years, year-wise; and

(d) the steps being taken by Government to popularise biogas plants in the State?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF NON-CONVENTIONAL ENERGY SOURCES (CAPT. JAI NARAIN PRASAD NISHAD): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b). Under the National Project on Biogas Development (NPBD), a target of setting up of 1500 family type biogas plants has been allocated to the State Government of Bihar for 1997-98. Besides, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), All India Women's Conference and South Asia Partnership-India are also implementing NPBD in the States.